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STATE AUDITOR'S
REPORT ON
STATE COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY COMPLIANCE
WITH ADMISSION STANDARDS AND
REMEDIAL EDUCATION ENROLLMENT POLICIES
AS OF THE FALL OF 1997

OFFICIAL AUDIT REPORT

NOV - 9 1998

ISSUED BY THE
Department of the State Auditor

TABLE OF CONTENTS/EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

| | <u>Page</u> |
|---|-------------|
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| <p>As authorized by Chapter 11, Section 12, of the Massachusetts General Laws, the Office of the State Auditor conducted an audit of Research and Planning Enrollment and Degree Systems data and remedial enrollment information contained in the fall 1997 admissions, student records, and course information files at the state colleges and university campuses in the Commonwealth, as requested by the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education (BHE). Our audit revealed overall compliance with the new BHE admissions standards for the fall 1997 semester at the institutions of higher learning that we reviewed. However, the following four audit results describe the reportable conditions we encountered during our review. We will issue a separate report on the University of Massachusetts - Amherst at a later date and Salem State College commissioned a private firm to review its compliance with the standards.</p> | |
| AUDIT RESULTS | 5 |
| <p>1. <u>Grade Point Average Calculations</u>: Our review disclosed that Bridgewater State College was calculating the grade point averages (GPA) of student applicants based on six semesters of high school grades rather than the seven semesters required by the BHE. Our review also revealed that the Massachusetts Maritime Academy was not calculating the GPA of student applicants using the BHE calculator in accordance with BHE regulations.</p> | 5 |
| <p>2. <u>Special Admissions Students</u>: Massachusetts Maritime Academy reported no Special Admissions students for the fall of 1997 to the BHE. Our review indicated that 24 students were categorized by the BHE as Special Admissions students.</p> | 6 |
| <p>3. <u>Excess Special Admissions Applicants</u>: Three of the educational institutions we reviewed --Fitchburg State College, Westfield State College, and the University of Massachusetts Lowell--had Special Admissions applicants in our test sample significantly in excess of the new 15% enrollee limit set by the BHE.</p> | 6 |
| <p>4. <u>Excess Developmental Education Program Enrollees</u>: Our review of remedial enrollments in our sample revealed that three educational institutions--the University of Massachusetts Boston, Dartmouth, and Lowell campuses--had exceeded the BHE 10% cap for September 1997 freshman class members enrolled in developmental courses.</p> | 7 |
| APPENDIX | 8 |



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INTRODUCTION

Background

As authorized by Chapter 11, Section 12, of the Massachusetts General Laws, the Office of the State Auditor conducted an audit of Research and Planning Enrollment and Degree Systems (RPEDS) data and remedial enrollment information contained in the fall 1997 admissions, student records, and course information files at the state colleges and university campuses in the Commonwealth, as requested by the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education (BHE).

In December 1995 the BHE, which was established under the provisions of Chapter 15A of the General Laws, adopted higher admissions standards for the Commonwealth's four-year public colleges and university campuses. The new standards went into effect for students applying for admission for the fall of 1997. The minimum grade point average (GPA) requirements for admission were phased in over a two-year period. The second phase became effective for students applying for admission for the fall of 1998. The minimum GPA requirements are higher for university admission than for state colleges. The new admissions standards for Massachusetts's nine state colleges and four university campuses are detailed in the BHE September 1996 publication, "Implementation Guide for High School Guidance Counselors." These standards do not apply to the state's community colleges, which maintain open admissions policies.

The BHE has established limitations on remedial course offerings at the state colleges and the university campuses. All public college and university presidents and chancellors were informed of a vote of the BHE requiring that by September 1997, based on a vote of BHE of March 18, 1996, the four-year public institutions of higher education shall enroll no more than 10% of the freshman class in developmental (remedial) reading, writing, and mathematics courses. The BHE vote also required that by September 1998, the number of enrollees in developmental courses be reduced to represent no more than 5% of the freshman class.

For our review, we examined the following schools:

Bridgewater State College
Fitchburg State College

Framingham State College
Mass. College of Art
Mass. College of Liberal Arts
Mass. Maritime Academy
Westfield State College
Worcester State College
University of Mass. – Boston
University of Mass. – Dartmouth
University of Mass. – Lowell

The compliance of the University of Massachusetts - Amherst campus with the new BHE standards will be reviewed in a separate report to be issued at a later date by the Office of the State Auditor. Also, since Salem State College's compliance with the new BHE standards is being reviewed in a separate report being prepared by a private accounting firm, it is not included as part of this report.

Audit Scope, Objectives, and Methodology

Our examination included a review based on a random sample of 10% of the total freshman class in all categories admitted in state colleges and university campuses for the fall semester of 1997. This 10% sample was generated from RPEDS information reported by the state colleges and university campuses to the BHE. Our review also included an examination of the developmental course list offering of each state college and university campus for the fall semester of 1997, as reported to the BHE, and the RPEDS report for the Number of Students Enrolled in Developmental Courses, which is prepared by each individual school. We conducted our audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

Our objectives were to determine whether the state colleges and university campuses had admitted students in the fall semester of 1997 in accordance with the new BHE admissions policy and the remedial education enrollment standards.

To meet our objectives, we reviewed the records of each student in our 10% sample and compared our results to the information reported by the school to the BHE via the RPEDS system. For each student folder reviewed, we:

- Examined high school transcripts;
- Recalculated GPAs using the computerized calculator system supplied to each school by BHE;
- Examined college transcripts for transfer students;

- Reviewed all other pertinent information and data; and
- Interviewed responsible officials.

The criteria that we used for our review was the new state college and university campus minimum admissions standards effective for students applying for admission for the fall semester of 1997. The new admissions standards are designed to rank applicants into one of the following four categories:

1. Freshman Applicants: An individual applying directly from high school or within three years of graduation with no prior college course work, or an individual with a high school diploma or GED and less than 12 credits of college course work. The student must have completed:

- 16 required academic courses, and attained
- The minimum GPA earned in those required courses, as listed below:

| <u>Effective Date</u> | <u>State College GPA</u> | <u>University GPA</u> |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Fall 1997 | 2.60 | 2.75 |
| Fall 1998 | 2.70 | 3.00 |

2. Transfer Applicants: Transfer students consist of applicants with:

- 12 or more transferable college credits and a minimum 2.5 college GPA.
- 12-23 transferable college credits and a minimum 2.0 college GPA, and a high school transcript that meets the admission standards for freshman applicants.
- 24 transferable credits and a minimum 2.0 college GPA.

3. Non-Traditional Applicants: Students applying for admission more than three years after high school graduation, or who have completed the GED, must show their ability to succeed in college, based upon their high school and/or college transcripts.

4. Special Admissions Applicants: Applicants not admissable under the standards for the other three categories may be accepted upon demonstration of their potential for academic success in a four-year program. Special admissions students were limited in 1997 to no more than 15% of new enrollees. The

percentage of special admissions students will decrease to 12% for 1998 admissions and 10% for 1999 admissions.

Students can also be admitted if they meet the requirements under one of the following admission standard exceptions:

- Learning Disabled Applicants
- English as a Second Language (ESL) Students
- Transfers from Massachusetts Community Colleges
- Vocational-Technical High School Students

To meet our objective on remedial educational enrollment, we reviewed the developmental course listing at each school and the number of enrollments as reported to the BHE and determined whether they were in compliance with the BHE's policy.

AUDIT RESULTS

Our audit revealed overall compliance with Massachusetts Board of Higher Education (BHE) admissions standards for the fall semester of 1997 at the institutions of higher learning that we reviewed, as detailed in the Appendix to this report, except for the matters described below. The results of our testing, which was based on a random 10% sample, is not projectable to the entire universe of 1997 admissions.

1. Grade Point Average Calculations

Our review of the student records at Bridgewater State College revealed that the college was calculating the grade point average (GPA) of student applicants based on six semesters of high school grades, as opposed to the BHE requirement of seven semesters. The seventh semester would, in fact, be the first semester of the student's senior year in high school. College officials attributed their noncompliance with BHE regulations to a staffing shortage in the admissions office and a turnover in the position of Director of Admissions.

Our review of student records at Massachusetts Maritime Academy revealed that, of the 26 student records sampled, only one indicated that Massachusetts Maritime Academy had used the BHE calculator to determine the student's GPA for admission purposes. Academy officials stated that, as a matter of practice, the academy used the GPA reflected on each student's high school grade transcript. However, since high school transcripts in many cases include courses that are not part of the 16 college preparatory course requirements established by the BHE, the academy cannot be assured that the GPA used for admission decisions is consistent with established criteria.

Recommendation: Bridgewater State College should calculate the GPAs of future applicants based on seven high school semesters, as required by the BHE. Massachusetts Maritime Academy should calculate student admission GPAs by using the BHE calculator program for incoming freshmen classes.

Auditee's Response:

Bridgewater State College responded:

The College has since hired a new Director of Admissions and is resolving staffing shortages. All future calculations of freshman GPAs will be based upon seven semesters instead of six.

Massachusetts Maritime Academy responded:

Thank you for your timely audit of the Academy's RPEDS report. We will immediately move to implement those recommendations stated in the Auditor's report. The Board of Higher Education calculator will be used in every case to determine each student's grade point average.

2. Special Admissions Students

Our review of student records revealed that although the Massachusetts Maritime Academy reported no Special Admissions students in the Research and Planning Enrollment and Degree Systems (RPEDS) data for the fall of 1997, our review of BHE admissions data indicated that 24 students admitted to the academy were categorized by the BHE as Special Admissions students.

Recommendation: The academy should accurately report the number of incoming students who should be categorized as Special Admissions students in accordance with BHE regulations.

Auditee's Response:

The Academy did not report the existence of special admission students on the RPEDS data. It was reported on the early enrollment report and as part of the Performance Measures Report. Effective immediately, we will ensure consistent reporting of data in all reports, including RPEDS.

3. Excess Special Admissions Applicants

The BHE describes Special Admissions applicants as follows:

Applicants not admissible under standards outlined for freshmen, transfer or non-traditional students may be accepted upon demonstration of their potential for academic success in a four-year program. Appropriate indicators of success include steadily improving high school grades, a high-class rank, special talents, and strong recommendations. Special admissions students will be limited in 1997 to no more than 15 percent of new enrollees; this will decrease to 12 percent in 1998 and 10 percent in 1999.

During our review, we determined that, based on our 10% sample, five of the educational institutions reviewed may have had Special Admissions applicants in excess of the 15% limit for new enrollees. Three

of the five institutions were significantly in excess of the 15% limitation, as detailed in the following schedule:

| <u>School</u> | <u>% Special Admissions</u> | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| | <u>Total Fall 1997 Enrollment</u> | <u>10% Sample Enrollment</u> | <u>Audited 10% Sample Enrollment</u> |
| Fitchburg State College | 15% | 17% | 24% |
| Westfield State College | 11% | 9% | 20% |
| University of Mass.-Lowell | 9% | 11% | 18% |

In accordance with an agreement between the BHE and the Office of the State Auditor, an audit of fall 1998 admissions will be conducted to determine the status of Special Admissions percentages at these schools.

4. Excess Developmental Education Program Enrollees

Our review of remedial enrollments at the state colleges and university campuses, as reported to the BHE by each school, revealed that three schools exceeded the BHE 10% cap for September 1997 freshman class members enrolled in developmental reading, writing, and mathematics courses, as detailed in the following schedule:

| <u>School</u> | <u>1997 Remedial Enrollments</u> | <u>% of 1997 Remedial Enrollments</u> |
|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| University of Mass.-Boston | 117 | 23% |
| University of Mass. -Dartmouth | 272 | 31% |
| University of Mass.-Lowell | 205 | 20% |

Moreover, the BHE further requires that the number of enrollments be reduced to represent no more than 5% of the freshman class by September 1998.

In accordance with an agreement between BHE and the Office of the State Auditor, an audit of fall 1998 enrollment will be conducted to determine the status of developmental course enrollments at these institutions.

APPENDIX

SCHEDULE OF REVIEW OF STATE COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY COMPLIANCE
WITH ADMISSIONS STANDARDS
AS OF FALL SEMESTER 1997

| College/University | Fall 1997 Admissions | 10% Sample Reviewed | Freshman | Student Categories | | | % Sample-Special Admissions | Total - Fall 1997 Special Admissions |
|---|-------------------------|------------------------|----------|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| | | | | Transferred | Non- Traditional | Special Admissions * | | |
| Bridgewater S.C. | 1,857 | 186 | 103 | 61 | 3 | 19 | 10% | 11% |
| Bridgewater S.C. | | | 98 | 61 | 3 | 24 | 13% | |
| Fitchburg S.C. | 762 | 76 | 35 | 22 | 6 | 13 | 17% | 15% |
| Fitchburg S.C. | | | 31 | 22 | 5 | 18 | 24% | |
| Framingham S.C. | 1,153 | 115 | 42 | 17 | 41 | 15 | 13% | 10% |
| Framingham S.C. | | | 40 | 55 | 5 | 15 | 13% | |
| Mass. College of Art Mass College of Art | 340 | 34 | 11 | 19 | 2 | 2 | 6% | 8% |
| | | | 10 | 19 | 2 | 3 | 9% | |
| Mass. Coll. Liberal Arts | 430 | 43 | 23 | 16 | 2 | 2 | 5% | 9% |
| Mass. Coll. Liberal Arts | | | 20 | 15 | 1 | 7 | 16% | |
| Mass Maritime Acad. | 259 | 26 | 17 | 7 | 0 | 2 | 8% | 9% |
| Mass Maritime Acad. | | | 16 | 6 | 0 | 4 | 15% | |
| Univ. of MA Boston | 1,984 | 198 | 37 | 136 | 19 | 6 | 3% | 5% |
| Univ. of MA Boston | | | 27 | 128 | 18 | 25 | 13% | |
| Univ. of MA Dartmouth | 1,286 | 129 | 80 | 17 | 15 | 17 | 13% | 10% |
| Univ. of MA Dartmouth | | | 77 | 16 | 15 | 21 | 16% | |
| Univ. of MA Lowell | 1,671 | 167 | 74 | 72 | 2 | 19 | 11% | 9% |
| Univ. of MA Lowell | | | 72 | 63 | 2 | 30 | 18% | |
| Westfield State College | 1,102 | 110 | 77 | 23 | 0 | 10 | 9% | 11% |
| Westfield State College | | | 66 | 22 | 0 | 22 | 20% | |
| Worcester State College | 942 | 94 | 50 | 42 | 0 | 2 | 2% | 3% |
| Worcester State College | | | 39 | 41 | 0 | 14 | 15% | |
| Totals Reported | 11,786 | 1,178 | 549 | 432 | 90 | 107 | | |
| Totals as Audited | | 1,178 | 496 | 448 | 51 | 183 | | |

* Special Admissions limited in 1997 to no more than 15% of new enrollees.

